

# Recomposing The University

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by Tiziana Terranova & Marc Bousquet

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*Far removed from the clichéd image of the ‘ivory tower’, today’s universities have been opened to the harsh realities of neoliberal economics: huge volumes of students, extreme levels of performance-gearred management, casualisation of employment, and the conversion of students into ‘consumers’. In the name of democratisation and equality, the university has become a cross between a supermarket and a factory whose consumers are also its hyper-exploited labour force. Here, in an email exchange, Marc Bousquet and Tiziana Terranova, themselves employed in US and British universities respectively, describe the way the system works from the inside and look at the possibilities for getting out of it. Far from being a simple question of domination, they contend, the conditions of ‘mass intellectuality’ – also shared by many knowledge workers elsewhere in the ‘social factory’ – create enormous scope for new alliances and forms of resistance.*

**Tiziana Terranova:**

I think it would be good to start with the ‘big picture’, that is how the university is an open system opening onto the larger field of casualised and underpaid ‘socialised labour power’. The latter is also often referred to as ‘mass intellectuality’ or even networked intelligence (an abstract quality of social labour power as it becomes increasingly informational and communicative). I have been thinking about it in terms of the opening up of disciplinary institutions as described by Deleuze in his essay on control societies. I would like to move from the idea that the university is some kind of ivory tower or a self-enclosed institution whose current state and future concerns a minority of professionals to that of the university as part of the ‘diffuse factory’ as described in

**FOOTNOTES**

- 1 Tiziana Terranova, ‘Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy’ and Andrew Ross, ‘The Mental Labour Problem’, both in *Social Text* 63, vol.18, no.2: Summer 2000
- 2 Sadie Plant ‘The Virtual Complexity of Culture’ in G. Robertson et al (eds) *FutureNatural: nature/science/culture*. London: Routledge, 1996
- 3 Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott, Leo Parascondola, eds. *Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers: Writing Work in the Managed University*, Southern Illinois, 2004
- 4 Randy Martin, *The Financialisation of Daily Life*, Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2002
- 5 Antonio Negri ‘Archeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker’ in *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis & New Social Subjects 1967-83*. London: Red Notes, 1988

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they are also not invested in the labor aristocracy/bureaucracy of the trade unions. It would be crazy to call student life the perfect crucible for a movement to create greater equality. But the massification of higher ed has made it more likely. This is not nostalgia for 1968. Far from it. I think that the gigantic expansion of student experience, to the point where we have to see it as a modality of worker experience, creates opportunities so much larger than '68.

**TT:** I don't know about 'tutelage' but I would definitely be for a greater effort to open up connections with other forms of labor on the basis of what academic labor shares with them (from the common plague of managerial command and its attack on the time of life to the common implication in the diffuse social factory). On the other hand, there is also a specific contribution that academic labor can provide. This specificity is part of its role as a key site in the production and reproduction of knowledges and forms of control (from policy-oriented social research to scientific patents and new technologies); in its contribution to the production of specific forms of labor directly implicated in the reproduction of the social (from doctors to computer scientists, from managers to artists and social workers); but also in its relation to a wider abstract social labour power (informed, affective and communicational), which exceeds the disciplinary power of the work/wage relation. As you said, a big part of the university's work is still institutional: reproducing hierarchical differences and producing docile subjects, so hacking the machine of social reproduction in Higher Ed is bound to be complicated work. I doubt whether a successful engagement with this process would produce another 1968 - the latter was still a revolt against the institutions, while we know now that power operates in and through networks. But it will definitely be a challenging process to be part of - requiring commitment and imagination.

Autonomist work. I think that their description of a shift from a society where production takes place predominantly in the closed site of the factory to one where it is the whole of society that is turned into a factory – a productive site – is still very fitting politically. But in fact, the debate seems to be stuck in the false opposition between the static, sheltered ivory tower and the dynamic, democratic market.

**Marc Bousquet:** You're right to call it a false opposition, since the university has never been a shelter from either commerce or politics. And yet the nostalgic idea of the university as a 'refuge' from social life is amazingly persistent, isn't it? The reality is very different. Especially in the US, where nearly 60 percent of high school graduates have some experience of 'higher ed', it should be obvious that the university is part of the social factory. The problem is that it's the wrong kind of factory.

**TT:** Maybe.

**MB:** Anyway, it seems that the ivory tower myth persists because it has so many useful functions. For intellectuals, as well as many artists and activists, the idea of the university as a refuge often gives them the feeling of Archimedes – as if it offered a stable fulcrum from which they can move the earth itself. For others, the ivory tower image is a kind of smokescreen for the double-talk and structural transformations of neo-liberalism, a chastity belt as the Bush-Thatcher-Clinton-Blair bloc leads it to market: 'the university is too much of an ivory tower – we have to make it practical' on the one hand, and on the other hand: 'because the university is so much of an ivory tower, we can trust that its profit-seeking will be benevolent.' It signifies all the way around the political clock. Really, 'ivory tower' is the classic ideogeme – practically un-dislodgeable from any point of view.

**TT:** So the university is no longer, simply, an ivory tower (although I am sure that even the ivory tower persists in pockets of isolated privilege too), but it has not simply turned into a 'market' or 'supermarket' either – providing exciting new courses/services

to discriminating student-customers in search of that elusive perfect value-for-money combination. If anything, it is another site of implosion of the modern separation between consumption, production and reproduction.

**MB:** Yes, the sense of ‘separate’ circuits is quickly eroding. And ‘supermarket,’ as opposed to ‘market,’ is perfect. It goes beyond the nostalgia of the market-as- agora or public sphere to capture the sense of total commodification.

Once we see that the campus is seamlessly part of the whole (social and global) factory floor – in this sense an unprivileged location in a vast horizontal plane – it becomes an opportunity for the self-organisation of labour and, just as you say, reorganising the social relations of re/production. But in my mind that would mean giving up the fantasy of the fulcrum, of the ivory tower model in which the university offers a ‘safe space’ to benevolent ‘directors of the transformation,’ operating in a cloud-circled meta-plane for mental labourers. For the university to become a site of worker self-organisation and the reproduction of an oppositional mentality – much less the catalyst of a radicalised multitude or ‘mass intellectuality’ – it would mean operating in an unsafe manner.

**TT:** In your writings on US academic labour, you emphasise the increasing polarisation between tenured academics (of which many exercise mainly administrative/managerial functions of ‘directors of transformation’) and a large casualised teaching force of graduate students and temporary workers.

**MB:** Tenured faculty schizophrenically experience themselves as both labour and management, a contradictory position reflected in US labour law. They also have another schizophrenia of seeking to produce or direct a cultural-material transformation while simultaneously serving capital (as reproductive labour) through the socialisation of a disciplined professional-managerial class. Getting beyond either schizophrenia is a hazardous project that ultimately threatens the faculty’s ‘directorial’ position. In the US, for instance, more than half of tenured faculty in public higher

produces (taking into account for example the heterogeneous axes of subjectivation linked to ethnicity, race, nationality, gender, sexuality and so on). The shift from the ‘mass worker’ to ‘socialised labour power’ (or a multi-skilled, fully socialised and abstract labour power), was for the early Negri a matter of achieving a new working class identity – one that was adequate to the increasing levels of abstraction and socialisation of labour. The old transcendent dialectic was replaced with an immanent one: class composition, capitalist restructuring, class recomposition.<sup>5</sup> In other authors, such as Franco Berardi or Felix Guattari, however, the break with the dialectic is more radical. The emphasis is more on the heterogeneous production of subjectivity, which takes place at the level of material connections (crucially including desiring and technical machines, from the assembly line to media and computer networks). Subjectivity and class are not simply modes of reproduction but also alchemical, microbiological and machinic factories of social transformation.

**MB:** I agree.

**TT:** We could maybe close by talking about the place of academic labour within the labour movement at large (including all those mutant forms of labour that the trade union movement cannot reach).

**MB:** The one thing I would say is that it couldn’t be a privileged place. To give academic labour a vanguard position would be a disaster. A big part of the academic ‘labour of reproduction’ is the production, legitimation, and policing of inequality. I think academic labour, including organised academic labour, needs to submit itself to the tutelage of more radical forms of labour self-organisation. More radical than the trade union movement, as you say. Mass intellectuality implies a revolutionary transformation in the academic consciousness, faculty especially. That’s why I place so much emphasis on thinking about students as already workers, not just future workers. They are less ossified, less committed to inequality, than the faculty. To a certain extent

desires which not only the union but factory work as such could not satisfy. The figure of this first transformation was the ‘mass worker’ – unskilled, mass factory work that challenged the industrial production machine through the rigidity of its escalating demands and its simultaneous social mobility. The mass worker demanded and caused a reinvention of politics, rather than simply joining the class struggle as a new contingent would – it gave new impetus to the struggle for life time against the ‘time-measure’ of the wage/work relation. An implication is that class is not simply about the reproduction of dialectical domination, but it is also endowed with its own historicity – a kind of dynamic potential, a surplus of value that antagonistically produces new forms of life and demands new modes of political and cultural expression. Which brings us to today’s question. Should we read the expansion of higher education as, primarily, a desire of capital (for better trained, more manageable, stratified and hegemonised workers)? Or should we read in this transformation also the recomposition of class dynamics – a new production of values and forms of life which produce the basis for the reinvention of politics?

**MB:** Would it be waffling of me to say both are true? Just as the university is industrialised (albeit on a post-fordist footing of perma-temped labour in the mode of information), it – like the factory – becomes the location of an oppositional agency. Students – in their new character as workers in the present rather than the future – will in my view eventually understand themselves as the agents of their own exploitation. In that moment, we’ll understand the information university to have called forth its own gravediggers.

**TT:** Sure. And as usual, we must be careful about not repeating the old mistake of thinking of the working class as existing in a state of ‘unrealised consciousness’ which needs to be awoken by an external agency. If we keep this in mind, the main question becomes then not so much to map different fractions of the dominant and dominated classes and their relation to each other within the overall war of position, but to understand the shifting mode of class composition, its dynamics and the values that it

education are unionised. This is not impressive by European standards, but it’s three times the average level of worker organisation in the US. I bring it up because – with a few exceptions – it has thus far been very much an old-style craft unionism, a labour aristocracy that preserves workplace hierarchy, and has been very much complicit in the perma-temping of the university workforce, preserving their own jobs while selling out the future. While those unions are moving slowly to address casualisation, the kind of dramatic change implicit in the notion of a mass intellectuality or even the smaller fraction of mental labourers off the campus, would really imply a reverse of the trajectory we usually imagine: not, ‘how can the university serve as a platform for changing society on behalf of the casualised,’ but ‘how can the casualised hijack the university in their own interest?’ This dictatorship of the flexible would not be a safe process for the tenured who imagine themselves as directors of transformation and safely above the fray.

**TT:** Yes, and this reversal does not necessarily need to concern only university staff, but it must somehow construct an immanent connection to the masses of students who are increasingly going through higher education.

**MB:** Yes, absolutely.

**TT:** I find what is happening in the UK with higher education very interesting from this point of view. As you might be aware, the UK system has been through a turbulent decade. In most areas, budgets have been cut back or frozen for a number of years, while student numbers have increased exponentially (for example, according to UCAS statistics the number of accepted first year students has risen from 300,000 in 1996 to almost 370,000 in 2002 – an increase of 25 percent in just six years). The UK higher education system has gone from being a manageable cottage industry more or less autonomously run with a moderate number of students living more or less well on a grant system, to something that in places really looks like mass higher education – without the grants and with a new system of fees.

There is obviously much to be said about this process.

**MB:** More like the US model. Wide access, but fee-for-service. Though there was a period in which the largest US public systems – in New York and California – were both open-access and tuition free (or nearly free).

**TT:** Many students are going into higher education because they think that they have no choice in terms of their future occupational opportunities and they have been told that in spite of the massive debts that they will be likely to incur, higher education is, after all, a good investment in terms of future earnings. There is this weird conjuring trick where they are really ‘sold’ this image of themselves as customers in the university supermarket, while for many of them the reality is that they are working in supermarkets, hospitals, and temping in offices to pay for their maintenance while they are studying.

**MB:** Exactly right. Being a student is ideologically attached to the idea of ‘leisure’ when in reality it’s increasingly visible as a way of being hyper-exploited as a temp worker.

**TT:** On top of all this work, they will also get a ‘good’ start in life by learning to live with debt and there will be a good deal of that in their future life. Thus, while they are addressed as customers, they appear to me to be, in many cases, very far away from the model of the spoiled student or the education customer. They are working twice as hard as their predecessors to support themselves through their studies; while working they accumulate debts which they will have to work hard to pay back once they graduate, in an accumulation of interest rates that ranges from credit cards to personal loans to mortgages. There aren’t really very many student-customers are there. It seems to me that it is production through and through. What I wonder is what this mass of students is doing to higher education?

**MB:** You mean that they are changing the system by inhabiting it.

university, and the whole system of cultural capitalism and shaping the relationship of living labour to dead labour. It would be great to think in more detail what it means to understand ‘cultural capital’ as dead labour.

Anyway, what I really like about the questions you’re posing is the way it insists that we return to the question of the relationship of mental labour to other forms of labour. Are knowledge workers a ‘class’ unto themselves? Or are they a class fraction? If the latter, are they à la Bourdieu, the ‘dominated fraction of the dominant class’? Or à la Gramsci, are they the fraction of the working class that tends toward a traitorous alliance with the ruling class? I tend to think that your work confirms the Gramscian position. I suppose that follows necessarily from the autonomist point of view.

**TT:** This is a really interesting question. Gramsci was a keen observer of ‘civil society’ – and he was very aware that the complex relation between social classes was a historical and dynamic relation of shifting alliances, with hegemony constituting a kind of ‘moving equilibrium’. The space of civil society, however, is relatively solid, stratified and bounded. Classes enter relationships of alliance but are clearly distinguishable within the overall boundary of the nation state and the dialectic opposition between the dominant and the dominated.

**MB:** But for you it’s more a question of reinventing the terms of the struggle itself.

**TT:** Autonomist work started with trade-union sponsored social research into the reasons for declining union membership. The result of that theoretical, empirical and political inquiry was a foregrounding of the alchemical dynamics of class composition. Union membership was declining because neither the structure of the union nor its culture could cope with a shifting class composition (such as an increasing number of young, male, unskilled immigrant workers and their refusal of the unionist work ethic). This was not simply a new contingent coming to join the old generation, but also implied a new set of social needs and

scarce resources and tighter managerial control from actively engaging and experimenting with the massification of socialised labour power. Such power does not express itself simply as a unified or even fragmented class, but also as a constellation of singularities connected by communication machines and informational dynamics. All of this at a moment when organised labour is lagging behind (or is being easily accommodated by) the huge transformations induced by post-fordism and globalisation.

**MB:** Going back to the question you raised about the role of living knowledge labour in transformation. I completely agree with you that the biopolitical potential is there in the lived experience of the student.

Their experience, especially of frustrated expectations, leaves them 'primed' and potentially volatile in all the ways you describe. After all, the huge role the US professional and managerial fraction plays in organising production globally has thus far created an oversized managerial fraction relative to the size of the state. And the oversized role of the US – also Europe and Japan of course – in world consumption is related to the expectations associated with the labour of managing globally.

So the frustration of those outsized expectations is volatile in ways we totally haven't explored. And yet there is at the same time a proportionately greater effort devoted to containing it.

**TT:** It's hard to know where it might go.

**MB:** The question of tuition brings me back to what you said before about the socialising function of education debt – about students being schooled by indebtedness. That is such an immense field for future research. Randy Martin has written about it in 'The Financialisation of Daily Life,' in a great chapter about the politics of debt.<sup>4</sup> Debt is a way of making the relationship to dead labour more intimate than any possible relationship to living labour.

**TT:** Yes.

**MB:** There's something to be said about schooling, especially the

**TT:** Yes, I think that it is an exciting transformation and does not necessarily need to be interpreted as a 'dumbing down'. On the contrary, the entry of such a mass of students into higher education implies a political transformation in the role of the university – its reinvention, so to speak. The ways in which this transformation is being managed over here is totally predictable and unsurprising. On the one hand, there is a heightened level of top down, managerial, informational control – an endless, centralised output of new guidelines, targets and initiatives which introduce post-industrial management into the old guild-like university system and which in many cases is pushing teaching staff workloads to extreme limits.

On the student side, although stratified, the UK system is still in a turbulent phase of growth which means that 'new' and for many suspicious degrees (such as media studies) are over-recruiting, while older disciplines from mathematics to engineering are suffering. This lack of synchronicity between the degree market and the labour market is obviously a result of the interference of desire in what should be a 'rational' economic choice (thus undermining the notion of the rationality of the working class as an internal variable of capital, as Negri once put it). What seems to most concern the higher education managers, however, is not this lack of relation between the labour market and the degree market. They seem to be more concerned with preserving hierarchical differences between universities, degrees, and ultimately social classes.

**MB:** So the massification of higher ed represents an opportunity for transformation (and I guess you mean to indicate a pretty wide field of possibility, not just for a tighter fit between study and labour markets). But management is responding aggressively to contain the opportunity?

**TT:** There is an attempt to restrain the turbulence and instability introduced by rising student numbers by engineering a differential system of value – one that would be able to clearly distinguish, for example, prestigious institutions (an Ivy League) from their less prestigious, but still reputable peers (red brick universities), from a

bottom layer of vocationally-oriented, hands-on, working class not-quite-universities (ex-polytechnics). This is why we are going from the ‘star’ system of evaluation (where different departments get a number of stars depending on performance at the research assessment exercise) to a ‘league’ system. Apparently there were too many high ratings and not enough of a sense of ‘value-difference’. A league system will thus be introduced allowing a fine-graded hierarchisation of university degrees and research environments. The underlying idea is that ‘excellence’ can only be produced through a concentration of resources (including the best students) which goes against a great deal of what we know about ‘knowledge ecologies’ for example. An American colleague has suggested that here too the model is the United States where higher education has always been solidly stratified.

**MB:** Yes. More so every year.

**TT:** So I wanted to ask you about your experience. In which ways have the discourse and technologies of managerialism and privatisation interacted with the ferocious educational hierarchies that we know are a feature of the US higher education system?

**MB:** That’s a great question. There’s at least two issues here – the ranking of campuses against each other, and the role of higher education as a system in reproducing the ‘ferocious hierarchies’ of class relations in the US and globally (which still remain largely invisible to the US population).

The increasingly fine-grained ranking of campuses against each other is most important to the upper fractions of the professional-managerial class, for whom the ideology of the US as a ‘classless meritocracy’ remains partly viable (a fraction that includes most higher education faculty themselves, as well as media professionals, many lawyers and physicians, etc.). With the intensification of the ranking, the percentage of persons who feel that the ‘meritocracy’ is working appears to shrink. That realisation is probably a good thing overall. For instance, the appearance of graduate employee union movements at Ivy League campuses over the past 20 years (Yale, Columbia, Penn, Brown, Cornell) reflects in part the collapsing viability of merit ideology even while the

**TT:** Yes, the Protestant spirit is, at many levels, well and alive in managerial discourse. And maybe you have a point when you say that, from capital’s viewpoint, it is simply a matter of building an informational reserve army of workers. On the other hand, we also need to ask what social needs and desires and what processes of subjectivation does this reserve army express – what values it is capable of creating.

The question is also that of a direct and active engagement with specific student populations and their relation to this socialised labour power at large. This is why I have problems with a common counter-hegemonic argument against tuition fees (the hegemonic arguments being that ‘we cannot afford mass higher education’ or the ‘many should not pay for the few’ and that ‘a degree is a financial investment for the future’). The counter-hegemonic argument, by contrast, says that by making financial costs between different institutions variable, poorer students are kept away from the ‘best’ institutions. The argument is that tuition fees make social mobility across classes more difficult.

All of this is true, of course, but I think that it only captures a fraction of the huge depletion of resources that is thus perpetrated at the expense of a mass intellectuality. By making tuition fees variable, as you know well from the US, you also automatically make working conditions (and pay usually follows) dramatically different across different layers and sections of academic labour.

**MB:** You want to get beyond the liberal complaint about social mobility. It’s a more fundamental question of equality?

**TT:** In a way. In another way, this notion of equality still identifies knowledge too much with access to a limited cultural capital – rather than the huge, diverse and mutating flux of specialised knowledges and transversal connections which is a trademark of social production in network societies. It is not only a matter that the best lecturers will tend to flow towards the institutions where working conditions are better (less students and admin; more money for research; access to international academic networks etc.). It is mainly about how a large part of the living labour within the higher education system will be impeded by higher workloads,

lack of) that they will have to face, it is difficult to know what this outsourced and redundant surplus of educated labour could turn into – how it is going to interact with the communication machine, for example. I think that the early phase of the ‘free labour’ bonanza (where many chose to perform work that they perceived as rewarding either for free or for very little money) is over. At least in Europe, I have noticed a great interest in the problem of the exploitation (and economic sustainability) of autonomous, ‘creative’ labour.

**MB:** I wish there was a similar interest in the US. It’s definitely a question within managerial discourse, but still far less so in the mass of ‘creative’ labour. There is of course the graduate employee union movement, but there’s almost nothing in the undergraduate population. The primary form of undergraduate labour activism remains the anti-sweatshop movement. It’s very encouraging, of course. But it has real limits. It’s not an activism that proceeds from the situation of the student as labour, but from the situation of the student as consumer. The problem of the undergraduate as labour – as you say, an element of production – is almost completely unexplored. I have had two students write dissertations that partially speak to the topic. But there’s really almost nothing on it. At least in the US, there’s very little law and policy on the question as well. That’s what I mean when I talk about the ‘informal economy’ of the informationalised university. The relations of production going on under the sign of ‘student’ or ‘study’ or ‘youth’ are desperately under-regulated. It’s a question of hyper-exploitation.

There is a bit more work on the student as a future worker, especially as a mental labourer, but very little. It’s not framed as a question of a reserve army, but rather as a question of ‘extended youth,’ which young people are represented as ‘choosing.’ It’s really a version of the Puritan discourse, where your social and economic positioning is read as a function of your moral state. The under-employed (with ‘slack time’) are so because they’re morally slack, therefore require the benevolent intervention of work disciplines such as speed-up.

‘rank’ of schools against each other gains ever greater ‘cultural capital.’ The problem is that the ‘cultural capital,’ while real, is relative. The rank of schools acquires more relative value because overall the ‘cultural capital’ disseminated by schooling has become scarcer in some way that it’s important for us to try to understand.

**TT:** Do you see any consistent strategy or tactical manoeuvres through which such cultural capital is made scarce and then given a value?

**MB:** Well, the classic strategy of creating a ‘surplus’ of workers that has finally hit the American and European professional-managerial class, and the expansion of higher ed – not just internally, but globally – is a big part of that, isn’t it? The US business papers have been full of panicky articles about the ‘new’ outsourcing ‘crisis’ of white-collar work (engineering, programming, design). It wasn’t a ‘crisis’ when outsourcing referred only to manufacturing. The outsourcing of professional and managerial labour (even the reading of CAT scans performed in the US or UK by Indian physicians) puts a lot of pressure on the (formerly) national frames of higher ed/cultural capitalism. Equally important, as your great ‘Free Labour’ piece and Andrew Ross’s ‘The Mental Labour Problem’ demonstrate, is the way that higher ed creates opportunities for hyper-exploitation. Don’t you think that higher ed is a primary vector for the harnessing of affect, socialising bodies to the necessary technologies and creating the psychological desire to give mental/affective labour away for less than a wage?

**TT:** Well this would be consistent with Louis Althusser’s notion of education as ‘Institutional State Apparatus’ wouldn’t it? And there is no doubt, as Foucault once put it, that the university still partially ‘stands for the institutional apparatus through which society ensures its uneventful reproduction at the least cost to itself’. Sadie Plant used this quote to contest what she thinks is the ‘Platonic’ bias of many pedagogical approaches to higher education which contribute to making the university what Foucault said it was: the idea that knowledge is something that is ‘recalled’

ready made from an original source and then simply transmitted from mind to mind. This is really the uneventful reproduction of readymade knowledges for the purposes of social reproduction.<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt, that is, that the university is a site of reproduction of social knowledge and class stratifications. The range of courses and degrees now offered by higher education institutions means that today the university is producing nurses and doctors; managers and IT technicians; journalists, scientists, filmmakers, lawyers, artists, teachers and even waiters and the unemployed (yes a degree does not always guarantee a ‘middle class’ job).

On the other hand, it is not simply reproducing classes and professions but also participating in a larger process of qualitative recomposition at a moment of crisis for post-fordism in the mode of information of which the outsourcing of white collar work from the US is an example. Higher ed is not simply engaged in the production and reproduction of knowledges but also in that of an abstract social labour power which can be multiply deployed across a range of productive sites (from call centres to Reality TV shows).

**MB:** Right.

**TT:** For me a key moment of this process involves an engagement with managerial control. I would like to talk about your essay on managerialism in ‘rhet-comp’ [rhetoric and composition].<sup>3</sup>

**MB:** That piece just observes that the informationalising or permatemping of academic labour is not a neutral condition with respect to the knowledge that the academy produces. We call this the problem of ‘Tenured Bosses and Disposable Teachers.’

In rhet-comp, which is a subfield of English language studies, traditionally lower in status than literature and linguistics, more than 90 percent of the teaching is done by flex workers. (Flex workers deliver labour ‘in the mode of information,’ as if they were data on the management desktop – easily called up by a keystroke, and then just as easily dropped in the trash.) Tenure is primarily reserved for persons who directly manage the temp

workers, or who creatively theorise the work of supervised teaching. To a very real extent, the knowledge produced by the field is a knowledge for managers. Of course not all the knowledge is about the work of management. Much of it is. But I think you could argue that even the field’s knowledges on ‘other questions’ increasingly show the taint of the managerial world-view. There would have to be more research into that.

**TT:** So the tendency is for a collapse of the academic and managerial function in the service of institutional and social reproduction?

**MB:** Yes, but the real change is that it’s more than just reproduction. Academic managerialism is increasingly in the direct service of extracting surplus value from students as well as staff. The university is an accumulation machine. It employs students directly and it farms cheap or donated student labour out to its ‘corporate partners.’

The university’s extraction of surplus value needs to be seen as an under-regulated ‘semi-formal’ economy. For-profit universities accumulate investment capital. But ‘non-profit’ universities also accumulate in the form of buildings, grounds, libraries (fixed capital), and as investment capital in endowments. Accumulated resources such as campus sports facilities have to be understood, to a degree, as the collective property of the ruling class (as opposed to, say, the property of students). For instance, at my public research university few students can afford to go to basketball games – local elites occupy all the seats.

As has been suggested elsewhere, especially by the players themselves, student athletes are unpaid workers contributing to campus and corporate accumulation.

**TT:** What seems to be at stake, then, is not simply the reproduction of a dominant ideology, but also more explicitly the attempt to induce and/or capture (and contain and control) a biopolitical surplus value that exceeds social reproduction, a potential to induce social transformations and produce new forms of life. What I am saying is that even if many graduates are going to be disillusioned with the actual earnings and working conditions (or